

Captured 146 years ago, the Friendship Flag has linked two states together since the Civil War

By KAT BERGERON - kbergeron@sunherald.com

A: Pass Christian flag captured by Connecticut Yankees 146 years ago is back in the spotlight as descendants of the victors head to Mississippi to dedicate a monument at the Vicksburg National Military Park.

The 9th Regiment Connecticut Volunteers hope to restoke good will they garnered in 1885 when Union veterans bucked national anti-South sentiment to return the captured flag to Mississippi. With that gesture, the regimental flag of the 3rd Mississippi became the Friendship Flag.

"The 9th turned over the pristine banner to the state of Connecticut and when they asked for it back so they could return it to Mississippi, it was in horrible condition," said Bob Larkin of Cheshire, Conn., chairman of the monument committee.



COURTESY GRADY HOWELL / The 3rd Mississippi regimental flag designed and created by the women of Pass Christian in 1862 was given to the Mississippi Coast's Dahlgren Guard, then captured by the 9th Connecticut. The renamed Friendship Flag was returned to Mississippi in 1885 with added writing from the 9th.

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artillery.

The 10-foot marker has no mention of the Pass skirmish, only two months before their Vicksburg deaths, but the story is integral to descendants from both sides.

In the late 1980s the state loaned the flag to Beauvoir, the Biloxi museum estate of Confederate President Jefferson Davis. After Hurricane Katrina in 2005 the Connecticut group heard it was destroyed along with numerous other Beauvoir artifacts.

They were crestfallen but still hopeful to connect with descendants of the Pass Christian skirmish. They asked local media to spread the word about the upcoming dedication and the flag story. On Thursday, after a bit of post-Katrina sleuthing by the Sun Herald, the 9th heard the unexpected.

"Really? The flag didn't go out to sea?" said Tom Cullinan of Norwich, Conn., who will sing two history-revealing songs he's written at the dedication. "That's amazing. Everyone was telling us that it was gone.

"The connection still goes on between the 9th and the 3rd, with one day in misery but solidarity in perpetuity."

Before the storm, the Friendship Flag hung in Beauvoir's Confederate Museum. For the storm, the staff put it on the second floor of the Davis Presidential Library, where it survived the surge and was returned to the Mississippi Department of Archives & History.

"That flag is significant because it represents the importance of how the local ladies made flags for their Civil War soldiers," said Cindy Gardner, MDAH's director of collections.



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Later that year: Because it is among the first Confederate flags captured, it is paraded in the streets of New York City. The flag is in good condition when turned over to the state of Connecticut as spoils of war.

1885: With approval from the Connecticut Legislature, the 9th Regiment returns flag to 3rd Mississippi during the Feb. 26, 1885, ceremonies at the Cotton Centennial Exposition in New Orleans. It then becomes the property of the state of Mississippi.

Feb. 28, 1905: Both houses pass request by President Roosevelt to return all Confederate flags, but Mississippi had received The Friendship Flag 10 years earlier.

1987: Pass Christian Historical Society and local historian Billy Bourdin press city officials to adopt the Friendship Flag as a city symbol.

1988: Mississippi Department of Archives & History conserves original Friendship Flag and loans to Beauvoir, Jefferson Davis museum estate in Biloxi.

2005: Beauvoir staff moves flag from the Confederate Museum to second floor of the Davis Presidential Library as Hurricane Katrina approaches. In September, Beauvoir returns flag to Archives & History, and it is in storage until new Museum of Mississippi History opens.

To learn more about the skirmish and flag: quinnipiac.edu/other/ABL/etext/9reg/index.html; or flagspot.net/flags/us-mspch.html.

"The women of the 9th restored it and on Connecticut Day at the (Cotton) Centennial Exposition in New Orleans, it was delivered back to the 3rd Mississippi, in a gesture appreciated by the people of Mississippi."

Days before its April 4, 1862, capture, the women of Pass Christian presented the handmade banner to the Mississippi Coast's Dahlgren Guard. Outnumbered by more than 300 with no help coming, the Mississippians retreated from the 9th Connecticut who'd arrived from the Sound.

As in all wars, accounts vary. Some say the flag was "captured." Other reports claim it was found in the abandoned Confederate camp, still in its sheath.

The 9th hopes descendants of the 1862 Coast skirmish come to their Oct. 14 dedication of the new monument. It honors the regiment's 250 men lost to disease and heat in a failed Union effort to build a canal to bypass Vicksburg's Confederate

One report by a federal officer tells of how, when the 9th paraded the newly captured flag in Pass Christian, one of the Pass ladies "said she didn't think the Southern soldiers were cowards but she couldn't see how they could allow that flag to be taken."

Friendship Flag timeline

April 1862: Pass Christian women sew a regimental flag for the 3rd Mississippi and give it to the Dahlgren Guard, a Mississippi Coast unit of the 3rd.

April 4, 1862: Union soldiers land from the Sound, fire on the Pass wharf. Col. Thomas Mellon, commander of the Pass cantonment, realized they were heavily outnumbered and could expect no aid from other Coast Rebel companies so he ordered a retreat. The flag was left behind in the camp, or it was captured from retreating soldiers, depending on which account you read.

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GreyGhost wrote on 10/06/2008 10:54:17 PM:

As a general rule, I dont have much good to say about Yankee's, but this bunch show themselves to be Gentleman with good upbringing, just good Northern folk. God Bless you. As far as FDR is concerned, well now thats a different story.

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